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ABSTRACT

This summary report is the third of three reports (Preliminary, Final, and Summary) of the findings of the 1988 Provincial Writing Assessment in Manitoba, Canada for grades 4, 8, and 11 of French Immersion schools. It contains a brief description of the study along with recommendations. The report notes that the 1988 Writing Assessment was the first attempt to evaluate the English Language Arts program which utilizes procedures known as the Writing Process Model as it applies specifically to Immersion schools. The report describes briefly the 1988 Writing Assessment, construction and scoring, writing tasks, marking procedures, and the teacher questionnaire. It then reports results for grades 4, 8, and 11 separately for each grade level, and outlines recommendations. The report is one of a series of reports on writing assessment in regular English, French Immersion, and Franco-Manitoban programs. (SR)

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MANITOBA WRITING ASSESSMENT 1988

SUMMARY REPORT

FRENCH IMMERSION SCHOOLS

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MANITOBA

WRITING

ASSESSMENT

1988

SUMMARY REPORT

French Immersion Schools

A REPORT OF THE

CURRICULUM SERVICES BRANCH

MANITOBA EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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PREFACE

This Summary Report is the third of three reports of the findings of the 1988 Writing Assessment for grades 4, 8, and 11 of the Immersion schools. It contains a brief description of the study along with recommendations based not only upon teacher opinions but also upon the judgement of the Technical Advisory Committee. Members of the Committee reviewed the data and interpreted it in the light of their considerable knowledge and experience. Teachers and school administrators are encouraged to review the recommendations for applicability to their own programs.

There are two other series of reports in this assessment. They are the three Preliminary Reports which present the actual data and the Final Report which analzses the data and presents conclusions and recommendations.

The Preliminary Reports were distributed to all schools in the province as well as to school division offices, to teacher and trustee associations, to libraries, and to the universities. This Summary Report will receive the same distribution as the Preliminary Reports, while the more extensive Final Report will only be distributed to school division offices, teacher and trustee organizations, libraries, and universities. Copies of the Final Report, however, can be obtained from Manitoba Education and Training on request.

Students in regular English, French Immersion, and Franco-Manitoba programs were tested and reported on separately. There is a complete series of reports (Preliminary, Final, and Summary) available for each of these three populations.

Acknowledgements

This assessment would not have been possible without the assistance and co-operation of people too numerous to mention: the students who wrote the tests; teachers who administered the tests; those who assisted us with the pilot testing; and teachers who took the time to complete questionnaires. Special mention, however, must be made of a number of groups and individuals:

- Lucille Maurice who wrote this report.
- The members of the Joint Committee on Evaluation who provided guidance throughout the project.
- The following members of the Technical Advisory Committee who aided with the analysis and interpretation of results: Thérèse Blanc, Dorothy Trudel, Gestny Ewart, Pat Vandel, Ed Mann, Lois Quenel, Valérie Allard, Roger Landry, and John Lovelace.

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SUMMARY WRITING REPORT

The Writing Assessment

The Provincial Writing Assessment took place in May, 1988 at three grade levels: 4, 8, and 11. The purposes of the Writing Assessment were:

1. to provide benchmark indicators about student writing performance in levels 4, 8 and 11;

2. to obtain data on student writing performance which will assist in curriculum and program improvement at various levels;

3. to assist school divisions with student evaluations in writing; and

4. to help teachers improve their skills in evaluating student writing.

This report summarizes the English Writing Assessment results of grades 4, 8, and 11 in Immersion schools in Manitoba. In the case of the grade 4 students, the papers were evaluated by markers who had been trained on samples drawn from Immersion schools and whose expectations reflected the concerns for the constraints inherent in the English Language Arts curriculum in Immersion schools at that level (e.g., time element, transfers, and interferences). The grades 8 and 11 students had their papers assessed by the same group of provincial raters who marked the grades 8 and 11 English students' papers.

This was a first attempt by Manitoba Education to evaluate the English Language Arts program of studies as it applies specifically to Immersion schools. Results of the Immersion students were isolated with the purpose of obtaining data on the performance of these students, in an Immersion situation with its inherent constraints.

The data obtained on the writing tests were supplemented by further information gained from the comments of markers and from responses to a teacher's questionnaire about the context of instruction.

Construction and Scoring

The Technical Advisory Committee, formed in September, 1987, reviewed and selected forms of writing for the test appropriate to each of the three grade levels. It established, by consensus, the levels of expected performance. It decided upon an holistic evaluation of written products. For the purpose of describing student performance more precisely, it was thought necessary to specify competence in terms of those aspects of writing common to all prose. The elements or aspects decided upon for purposes of the writing test were: Organization and Sequence, Wording/Style, Focus or Theme, Ideas, Choice of Detail and Elaboration of Ideas, Sentence Structure, Usage, Punctuation and Capitalization, and Spelling.

A further consideration in constructing the test was the need, within the limits of the test, to mirror procedures recommended in the English Language Arts program for developing writing skills. These procedures provided for such pre- and post-writing activities as peer discussion, rough drafts, editing, revising, and re-writing.

Writing Tasks

The Technical Advisory Committee decided that two written tasks appropriate to age and grade would be chosen for each grade. Separate spelling tests would be administered to grades 8 and 11.

In grade 4, the two tasks were Story Writing and Report Writing. In the first task, students had to construct a story around the finding of a box on the way to school. The second task, Report Writing, required them to write a report on an animal. The report was based on research done previously.

In grade 8, the test consisted of two tasks and a spelling test of 24 words. The first assignment, Persuasive Writing, required students to take and maintain a position for or against one of six statements. The second task, Narrative Writing, required them to write a story set in one of four different time periods.

Grade 11 students were assigned two writing tasks and a spelling test of 20 words. The first task, Process Writing, required students to explain how something was done or organized. The second assignment, Essay Writing, asked students to respond to a newspaper article by writing a personal opinion essay. Pilot tests were conducted in several schools.

Marking Procedures

The same marking procedures were followed at each grade level. The written products were marked holistically and evaluated on two types of scales: a General Impression Marking Scale and nine Analytic Scales.

The holistic nature of the marking allowed the markers to maintain a focus on the central meaning of the written product while observing the way the parts related to one another; thus they were able to rate the different aspects of writing.

The markers were all experienced teachers who were carefully trained in these forms of holistic marking. Their knowledge of the classroom enabled the assessment to present a picture of current practice and a valid normative measure of student writing performance.

The Teacher Questionnaire

The Teacher Questionnaire was undertaken to obtain more information about the processes and strategies used in Manitoba schools to generate writing.

Information on the following aspects and activities was obtained from the questionnaires.

Pre-writing Activities:
In all grades (4-8-11), the most common pre-writing activities were: talking, brainstorming, listening, and free writing.

Strategies:
The strategies most often used by students were: jotting down notes, posing questions to be explored, outlining, and categorizing.

Purposes:
Remarks made by the teachers indicate that many felt some categories overlap. However, from the tables, "to entertain", "to describe", "to inform", "to explain" were the most commonly identified purposes for grades 4 and 8: "to explain", "to persuade" "to interpret" for grade 11.

Sources:
For grades 4 and 8, the student's personal experience was listed as the most common source for writing topics: response to literature was second on the list: topics in other school subjects was third.

For grade 11, response to literature appeared most frequently, with students writing about personal experiences in second rank.

Audiences:
It was reported that students write equally as often for their peers as for their teachers.

Stages of Writing:
Drafting, revising, editing, rewriting for publication, proofreading, sharing with each other.

In grade 4, students engage in all of these activities in at least 90% of their writings (once a month or more often), except for rewriting for publication which is done in 67.7% of their writings.

In grades 8 and 11, students engage in all of these activities in 80% of their writings (once a month or more often), except for rewriting for publication which is done 38.1% of their writings (for grade 8), and 27.3% (for grade 11).

Conferencing (with each other or the teacher):
In grade 4, students conferencing with each other or with the teacher (from one to three times a month to one or more times a week) happens frequently, that is approximately 85% of the time.

In grades 8 and 11, student conferencing with the teacher happened less often.

Sharing:
It was evident from the answers supplied that much sharing of the students' final products goes on. For all grades (4, 8, 11), many of the writings are read or presented to the group, put on class or school bulletin boards, placed in school libraries, or published in school newspapers.

Writing Folders:
The numerous comments made by teachers indicate a widespread and enthusiastic use of writing folders which are used by many as organizational and motivational tools in the writing classroom. Many teachers acknowledged their usefulness in evaluating the students' progress in writing over time in a variety of writing assignments.

Results

The results for grades 4, 8, and 11 are reported separately for each grade level.

These results show the percentage of students scoring within the low, middle, and high range on the General Impression Marking (GIM) scale and the nine Analytic scales.

In each case the mean score is indicated. The mean score on the GIM scale represents a score out of a maximum of 12, while the mean scores on the nine Analytic scales represent scores out of a maximum of 6.

In order to be able to pass a judgement on the quality of performance represented by the results, the members of the Technical Advisory Committee arrived at the following guidelines by consensus. If the combined percentage of students in the middle and high ranges was 85% or above, it was considered indicative of a strength. The Committee felt that results between 80% and 85% indicated satisfactory achievement. Anything that was 80% or less (i.e., 20% or more in the low range) indicated a need for improvement.

Grade 4 Results

STORY WRITING

	Low	Middle	High	Mean
GIM	13.9%	73.6%	12.5%	6.33
1. Organization and Sequence	32.2	61.5	6.3	3.00
2. Wording and Style	31.2	62.1	6.7	2.98
3. Focus or Theme	29.3	63.5	7.2	3.03
4. Ideas	32.2	57.2	9.6	3.00
5. Detail/Elaboration	38.0	52.9	9.1	2.95
6. Sentence Structure	25.5	65.4	9.1	3.12
7. Usage	10.1	82.2	7.7	3.36
8. Punctuation/Capitals	24.0	65.4	10.6	3.16
9. Spelling	23.1	70.2	6.7	3.15

REPORT WRITING

	Low	Middle	High	Mean
GIM	20.7%	68.7%	10.6%	5.98
1. Organization and Sequence	33.2	61.0	5.8	2.89
2. Wording and Style	34.6	59.1	6.3	2.94
3. Focus or Theme	26.0	66.3	7.7	3.09
4. Ideas	28.4	62.5	9.1	3.06
5. Detail/Elaboration	30.3	59.6	10.1	3.04
6. Sentence Structure	23.6	68.2	8.2	3.15
7. Usage	7.7	75.0	17.3	3.62
8. Punctuation/Capitals	9.6	65.4	25.0	3.72
9. Spelling	16.8	69.3	13.9	3.37

GIM results show that an acceptable percentage of the grade 4 Immersion students can write a paper, either in story or report form, where the quality of thought and effectiveness of overall organization and presentation is appropriate for the grade 4 level.

The analytical scale shows strength in the mechanics of writing, e.g., usage punctuation/capitals, and spelling, in spite of interferences from the second language in some areas.

These results might be indicative of transfers of learning occurring from one language to another, although it is more difficult to pinpoint transfers than it is to pinpoint interferences. The transfers of learning would compensate for the time constraint placed on the teaching of English Language Arts in an Immersion setting.

Areas which need to be strengthened are those of organization and sequence, sentence structure, focus, ideas and especially detail (elaboration). These characteristics of writing will most benefit from classroom strategies that foster the develop of ideas and vocabulary and promote organization and sentence variety, e.g., discussions, brain-storming, mapping/webbing, sentence manipulation (on a regular basis in English and in French). Research skills, organization and presentation techniques, and theme development strategies would benefit from instruction received in both languages and points to the need to maintain or implement the "process of writing" in all Immersion classrooms.

Grade 8 Results

PERSUASIVE WRITING

	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH	MEAN
GIM	13.9%	58.1%	28.0%	7.08
1. Organization and Sequence	20.4	60.7	18.8	3.41
2. Wording and Style	12.9	72.6	14.5	3.45
3. Focus or Theme	24.2	58.1	17.8	3.40
4. Ideas	31.2	56.4	12.4	3.16
5. Detail/Elaboration	35.4	53.3	11.3	3.00
6. Sentence Structure	18.3	69.8	11.8	3.34
7. Usage	16.2	75.8	8.0	3.38
8. Punctuation/Capitals	14.0	67.2	18.9	3.60
9. Spelling	10.2	68.3	21.5	3.65

NARRATIVE WRITING

	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH	MEAN
GIM	15.5%	54.1%	30.4%	7.17
1. Organization and Sequence	18.2	50.3	31.5	3.65
2. Wording and Style	17.7	58.0	24.3	3.61
3. Focus or Theme	22.7	46.4	30.9	3.57
4. Ideas	23.2	51.9	24.9	3.56
5. Detail/Elaboration	26.5	52.5	21.0	3.39
6. Sentence Structure	25.4	51.4	23.2	3.44
7. Usage	14.9	58.0	27.1	3.72
8. Punctuation/Capitals	21.5	47.0	31.5	3.67
9. Spelling	18.8	46.4	34.9	3.85

Results indicate that in persuasive writing 86.1% of the students performed in the middle and high ranges; in narrative writing 84.5% of the students attained the same level of performance. These results indicate that an acceptable percentage of the grade 8 Immersion students present a paper in both genres of writing where the quality of thought and expression is appropriate for the grade level. In all aspects of organization and presentation, a good percentage of papers demonstrated performance that was acceptable for a grade 8 Immersion student. It was felt that these students had a general awareness of the qualities and attributes particular to the two tasks at hand.

The analytical scale shows strengths in spelling, punctuation and capitals, wording and style, usage, and focus in narrative writing.

Organization and sequence and sentence structure, in both tasks, and focus or theme in persuasive writing were judged to be adequate in spite of certain weaknesses.

Areas which need to be strengthened are those of ideas, details, and elaboration of ideas in both genres.

Spelling

The results of the spelling subtest indicate that 62.6% of the students spelled 75% or more of the words correctly. Twenty-eight point three percent (28.3%) of the students spelled 50%-75% of the words correctly while 9.1% of the students spelled less than 50% of the words correctly.

Grade 11 Results

The number of French Immersion students tested in English 201 was only 7. Because of the small number of students, no separate analysis is done on the results of this group. Therefore, only the combined 200 and 201 results are discussed in this report. (For the sake of completeness, however, separate results were reported in the Preliminary and Final Reports.)

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS 200 & 201 COMBINED

PROCESS WRITING

	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH	MEAN
GIM	6.3%	70.3%	23.4%	7.21
1. Organization and Sequence	12.6	64.0	23.4	3.65
2. Wording and Style	10.3	74.3	15.4	3.53
3. Focus or Theme	9.7	66.3	24.0	3.75
4. Ideas	15.4	66.3	18.3	3.42
5. Detail/Elaboration	17.1	68.0	14.9	3.36
6. Sentence Structure	16.6	68.5	14.9	3.46
7. Usage	13.7	68.6	17.7	3.51
8. Punctuation/Capitals	10.9	57.1	32.0	3.86
9. Spelling	9.1	46.9	44.0	4.15

ESSAY WRITING

	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH	MEAN
GIM	8.9%	62.7%	28.4%	7.25
1. Organization and Sequence	19.5	56.8	23.7	3.51
2. Wording and Style	9.5	76.3	14.2	3.53
3. Focus or Theme	24.9	52.0	23.1	3.42
4. Ideas	20.7	61.0	18.3	3.45
5. Detail/Elaboration	22.5	59.2	18.3	3.37
6. Sentence Structure	15.4	65.1	19.5	3.58
7. Usage	16.6	64.5	18.9	3.52
8. Punctuation/Capitals	5.3	54.5	4.02	4.15
9. Spelling	13.0	45.0	42.0	4.07

Results from the GIM indicate that when the 200 and 201 student results are combined, 93.9% of the students place in the middle and high ranges for process writing; 91.1% of the students attain the same level of performance for essay writing. It was felt that these results generally reflected the expected performance of the identified population when results from the 200's and 201's are combined, with one out of four students performing at the high level (23.4% - 28.4%) and another two-thirds of the students placing in the middle range (70.3% - 62.7%).

It was felt by the markers that, in general, grade 11 Immersion students write well and have responded suitably to the tasks assigned. In several cases, the quality of writing was felt to be equivalent to a grade 12 standard.

The analytical scale shows definite strengths in spelling, punctuation and capitalization, and wording and style in both genres of writing. Organization and sequence, focus and theme, and usage are strengths in the process writing.

Results indicate satisfactory performances by the students in the following: sentence structure in both genres, ideas and elaboration of details in process writing, and organization/sequence and usage in essay writing.

Areas needing improvement are: focus, ideas, and elaboration of detail in essay writing.

Generally, there was consistently higher scoring in the process writing, than in essay writing.

Spelling

The results of the spelling subtest indicate that 57.8% of the students (200-201 combined) spelled 75% or more of the words correctly. Thirty-three point one percent (33.1%) of the students spelled 50%-75% of the words correctly while 9.5% of the students spelled less than 50% of the words correctly.

Recommendations

1. In all grades the best performance scores were obtained in the mechanics of writing: Spelling, Punctuation and Capitalization.

   It is recommended that:

   - **The strong Spelling and Punctuation program in schools be maintained and incorporated into pre- and post-writing activities in imaginative ways without imposing restraints on the students' expression of thoughts and feelings.**

     Where weak usage occurs, particularly in cases from weaker language background, instruction at the sentence level be given. This instruction should not be divorced from students' actual writing.

2. On the Analytic scales, weak scores were recorded for all grades in the important areas of Content and Expression; namely Ideas, Organization and Sequence, Choice of Detail and Elaboration, Theme or Focus, and Sentence Structure.

These five components of the composing process involve such high order thinking and language skills as generating, interpreting, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating ideas and presenting them in orderly progression with a sense of purpose.

In each of these five elements, 15% or more of all students were functioning at the low level. The writing of these students was rated weak because of the poverty or superficiality of ideas. Students in this group who had original ideas often lacked the ability to organize and express their thoughts effectively.

The results show most students in the sample need instruction in procedures which would help them explore ideas sensitively and systematically in order to determine what they wish to say.

Replies to the questionnaire suggest that most teachers use only a limited range of pre-writing activities. The use of effective improvised classroom drama is significantly low.

A particular weakness in the writing at all grades was the inability of students to clarify and elaborate upon their ideas.

Also, the markers in their comments refer to the lack of editing done between first and final drafts and the failure of students to use the post-writing stage to elaborate ideas and to link purpose, audience, and voice in their writing.

From the test results and markers' comments, it seems necessary that students be given more help at the post-writing stage in learning how to focus, sustain, and support their ideas, and to master strategies that would make their writing more vivid and better organized.

Specific help should be given in supporting assertions, qualifying generalizations by using modifiers, phrases, and clauses.

It is recommended that:

- **Provincial and local inservice agencies provide workshops and discussions for teachers to examine the writing process. These workshops should aim to help teachers remove many of the frustrations and difficulties many students feel about writing by:**

  (a) promoting useful pre-writing activities which promote the generation and elaboration of ideas, including the use of classroom drama, discussion, brainstorming, and role-playing;

  (b) assisting teachers to apply and adapt small group instruction to local conditions;

(c) viewing and discussing tapes of good classroom practices, particularly the viewing of tapes dealing with initiating student writing;

(d) helping teachers to formulate topics for student writing and expand the uses and amounts of writing done in school; and

(e) exploring more fully the relationship between expressive (personal) writing and transactional (informational) writing.

♦ Teachers

(a) strive to develop their own facility in writing;

(b) attend local and provincial workshops to examine and study the curriculum as it applies to the writing process in general, and to the particularities of the the learning situation in a second-language setting;

(c) use language arts for teaching writing skills required in different subject areas and use the content of other subjects to teach language arts;

(d) be aware that development in writing is based on the requirements of the individual student's writing which allows the marker to maintain a focus on the central meaning of the written product while observing the way the parts relate to one another;

(e) include in their methodology such strategies as conferencing, peer-tutoring, drama, puppetry and interviews, and the use of writing folders. All of these are essential to the teaching and evaluation of spoken and written language.

(f) become cognizant of the holistic approach to evaluating students' writing which allows the marker to maintain a focus on the central meaning of the written product while observing the way the parts relate to one another.

3. Responses to the Questionnaire indicate an interest in evaluation generally and a growing use of peer evaluation and anthologies (folders) of written products as well as an improved attitude among teachers to provincial testing since 1982.

The interest of teachers in holistic methods of marking stems from the need for accurate and efficient methods of monitoring writing growth.

Large class sizes, mounting parental and public interest, and an anticipated increase in the amount of writing expected to be marked, demand that the methods of monitoring be visible, reliable, progressive in nature and economical in the use of the teachers' time.

It is recommended that:

♦ **The Department of Education and Training continue to initiate and run inservices and workshops on evaluation of writing so that teachers throughout the Province are exposed to successful approaches and criteria for evaluation. These approaches should include ways of commenting positively on writing that would generally help the student.**

4. Teachers from kindergarten to beyond high school face a challenge to develop writing competence in students through learning strategies and learning environments which, while emphasizing a process approach to learning, recognize the importance of knowledge.

   In an age of technology there is a need to access and communicate large amounts of information. The ability to write remains a basic prerequisite to success in our society.

   This challenge to serve youth and society under the fluid conditions that prevail today demands the collective effort of all educators.

   It is recommended that:

- **The Department of Education and Training undertake the reorganization of the Manitoba Writing Project in conjunction with the universities, community colleges, faculties of education, Manitoba Teachers' Society, and the Manitoba Association of School Trustees.**

  The purpose of this Project would be:

  (i) to promote interest in the teaching of writing at all levels.

  (ii) to provide summer workshops and courses with university accreditation for teachers.

  (iii) to develop a pool or cadre of teachers of writing available for local inservice education.

  (iv) to act as a clearing house for ideas, strategies, research and study in writing, and to maintain contact with similar organizations throughout the world.

  (v) to promote interest in student writing.

  (vi) to make and circulate tapes of good writing practices.

5. Given the growing knowledge and interest on how children develop as writers and given that this Writing Assessment was designed to reflect what is now considered essential in the teaching and evaluation of writing, the Technical Advisory Committee recommended that the divisional inservice agencies provide instructional leadership and support professional development in all areas of the writing process.

   It is therefore recommended that:

- **School Divisions both encourage and provide teachers with the opportunity, through workshops and discussions, to:**

  (a) examine the writing process for themselves;

  (b) examine and study the curriculum as it applies to the writing process and to initiate inquiry into the kinds of writing students need in different contexts; and

(c) **develop an awareness of the holistic method of evaluating the written products of their students and acquire the skills to practice it in their classroom.**

6. Given the importance of language and writing across levels and content areas to one's learning, universities and other post-secondary institutions are urged to provide increased opportunities for teachers in training to develop their skills in the teaching of language and writing.

It is therefore recommended that:

♦ **Teachers in training at the undergraduate level:**

(a) **be required to take courses that provide them with a good understanding of the current philosophy concerning the writing process;**

(b) **be taught, through very practical methods, how to evaluate their students' writing, in line with what is now considered essential in writing;**

(c) **have access to writing centres (already in existence in some universities). These centres allow participants to apply to their own assignments the principles of the process of writing and, thereby, gain an understanding of this concept and of the strategies involved. This practical training would have a positive spin-off on their teaching of writing in the classroom.**

7. The Technical Advisory Committee felt that the Department of Education and Training should be commended for the type of testing instrument developed for the Writing Assessment of 1988. The purpose of this test was to ensure that the goals and objectives of the writing strand of the Manitoba Language Arts Curriculum were accurately and comprehensively reflected.

The test development committee, aware of the needs of children as writers, attempted to create a testing situation that replicated as closely as possible the classroom procedures used by teachers following the writing process. Provisions were made for:

1. the writing for different purposes:
   - Grade 4 - story writing and report writing
   - Grade 8 - persuasive writing and narrative writing
   - Grade 11 - process writing and essay writing

2. a time format that allowed for writing to take place over a period of several days (3 or 4), and which included group discussions, revising, editing, proofreading, and recopying of final copies.

Teachers on the Technical Advisory Committee thought that the time dimension was crucial. They felt that if enough time were given for the test, allowing it to parallel the actual writing process in the class-

room, then the writing assessment could be viewed by all participants (teachers and students alike) as an authentic activity in communication occurring in the classroom, with everyone participating. It would remove the burden of being the "unlucky" few, randomly chosen to write a test. It seems important that the assessment be accepted as a useful teaching tool in classroom communication given in the context of the writing process.

According to the members of the Technical Advisory Committee, this procedure did produce positive results; some further refinement, however, is still required.

It is, therefore, recommended that:

♦ **The Department of Education and Training consider the following with an aim to improving future tests:**

(a) **increasing the time span for writing the test (to a two weeks' period, if need be), in order to further approximate the writing process as it happens in the classroom. This time span would allow:**

- **for a sharing of the students' texts with their peers. This would legitimize instructions given in the test to establish the audience, i.e., "Write your story with your classmates as intended audience".**

- **for a more thorough research of a subject for report writing (in grade 4). The test instructions suggested that one hour be allowed to do relevant research at school and that encouragement be given for further research at home. It was noted that library facilities could have been overtaxed when two or three classes were doing research at the same time, and that many children do not have resource materials for research at home. A longer time in which to do this research would alleviate this problem.**

(b) **providing clearer instructions regarding the use of dictionaries, thesaurus, language aids (for checking surface features) and "slim-jims", notes (for doing research) when writing the test. These are valid, recommended tools when writing in the classroom, and committee members felt their use should be permitted when doing the writing assessment. The stated purpose of the test was to "find out how well students are using some important skills in writing" and not "how well they can remember (memory test)".**

(c) **re-examining the categories used for the analytic marking. It is suggested that one category, mechanics, could include spelling, punctuation, capitalization and usage. Also, the criteria for style, which might include sentence structure, deserves to be elaborated.**

(d) **providing for only a code number to appear on the writing booklets, eliminating any possible bias effect caused by the presence of names, or levels (i.e., 200-201, as in the case of grade 11).**

(e) taking steps to increase student motivation in writing the test. Performance on the provincial assessment has no influence on report card marks or school grades. Teachers on the Technical Advisory Committee felt that for this reason, some students, especially at the upper levels, may fail to put forward sincere, positive efforts. It was also noted that because of the semester system, some schools having no instruction in English at that time, did not participate in the Assessment. Other schools chose to have the students picked in the random samples removed from the classroom to write, while the rest of the students carried on their regular work. The Committee suggested that if, in the future years, provisions were made by the divisions to obtain total class group participation in a writing assignment that meets the conditions of an authentic writing situation, the random samples forwarded to Manitoba Education would be a real test of what happens in a writing classroom in the province.

References

1. Manitoba Writing Assessment Program 1988, Preliminary Report: Grade 4 Test Data, French Immersion Schools

2. Manitoba Writing Assessment Program 1988, Preliminary Report: Grade 8 Test Data, French Immersion Schools

3. Manitoba Writing Assessment Program 1988, Preliminary Report: Grade 11 Test Data, French Immersion Schools

4. Manitoba Writing Assessment Program 1988, Final Report: French Immersion Schools